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ABSTRACT

Planning for the higher education system in the past involved designing, implementing, and evaluating a set of envisaged policies, strategies and operational actions for the medium and long-run. In Brazil, however, this sort of planning was virtually abandoned and replaced by short-term planning, partly as a result of the interplay of political forces and political options which did not identify expansion of public schooling as a priority, and other contributory factors, such as diminishing economic growth rates and an increasing foreign debt. Policies adopted by the Brazilian government over the last two decades inadequately dealt with several problems encountered by the system, including the governance, autonomy and accountability of public universities. After an introduction, the second section reviews the evolution of higher education policies in Brazil in recent years. The third section discusses some features of the relationship between public universities and the state with regard to autonomy, governance and accountability, and the final section addresses some of the challenges that are posed by rendering public universities accountable to society. Sixteen references are included. (LPT)

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WORKING PAPER
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University, autonomy and accountability in Brazil: a couple of challenges for the decade

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HE 023 888

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Introduction

During the sixties, typical planning for the higher education system used to involve designing, implementing and evaluating a set of envisaged policies, strategies and operational actions for the sector in the medium and long run. This sort of planning usually assumed neutrality regarding politics and was presumably based on a techno-rational approach to educational problems (Hallak, 1978). As it has been noted, this approach implied a management approach to social change (Levin, 1978) and, as such, it was doomed to failure in societies in which the interplay of political forces denies the predominance of that sort of rationality or imposes the interests of dominant groups and strata.

In Brazil, this sort of planning for the higher education system was virtually abandoned about a couple of decades ago and replaced by short term. This was partly a result of the mentioned interplay of political forces and it was also a consequence of political options in which the expansion of public schooling was not a priority; more recently, the slowdown of economic growth rates and an increasing foreign debt additionally contributed to that effect (Velloso, 1989).

Policies adopted by the government in the last two decades or so did not adequately deal with a number of the problems faced by the system and, additionally, generated several other problems. Some of these have to do with the governance, autonomy and accountability of public universities. This paper succintly discusses a few of the relevant aspects pertaining to these topics. While the discussion is centered on Brazilian higher education, some of the issues addressed here are pertinent to other Latin American countries as well.

The following section briefly reviews the policies for higher education in the recent past. The third section discusses some features of the relationships of public universities with the state in regard to governance, autonomy and accountability. The final section addresses some of the challenges that are posed by rendering public universities accountable to society

Past trends and the current scenario

A brief review of the evolution of higher education in the country in the past few decades may help explain current policies and dilemmas of the sector as far as governance, autonomy and accoutability are concerned. Planning for higher education at the national level started in the mid-sixties, after the coup d'État in 1964. A ten-year plan for all levels of schooling was designed by the authoritarian regime but it was short-lived and replaced by a three-year plan a few years later (Velloso, 1980);

both plans established manpower targets for higher and vocational education. Before the end of the decade attempts to pursue manpower forecasting has been actually abandoned. For one thing, the expansion of enrollment in higher education and that of college graduates have surpassed all possible targets.

In Latin America, planning for higher education often served as an ideological cornerstone of attempts to refrain the fast expansion of enrollments, taken to be disorderly and conducive to transform educational services in a mass-consumption product (Cano, 1984). This rationale was underlying the first ten-year Brazilian educational plan and the one that followed it, but it was soon defeated by the policies de facto adopted by the regime.

These policies responded to mounting pressures from owners of private schools and colleges as well as from other entrepreneurs, for whom higher education was becoming an investment of high returns. Those pressures found a fertile field in the recommendations of a federal government commitee in charge of preparing a reform of Brazilian higher education. For this comittee, enrollments should expand but public expenditures should not (Cunha, 1988a; Martins, 1989). The reform was approved by the National Congress and enacted in 1968. One of its basic guidelines defined the university as the standard for the expansion and organization of higher education. Those very pressures, however, soon would lead to public policies quite different from those suggested by that basic guideline.

Policies that were adopted since the turn of decade brought profound changes in the higher education scenario. Enrollment in the private sector grew at extremely fast rates until the mid-seventies (170% between 1970 and 1974, for instance), while vacancies in public universities and colleges expanded very slowly. Accordingly, the share of the public sector in total enrollment dropped sharply from 60% in the late sixties to the current 40%.

Enrollment increases in the private sector were stimulated by the state, satisfying a rising demand for vacancies from the middle classes and thus contributing to give legitimacy to the authoritarian regime. The small proprietary institutions that flourished usually offered night classes only, catering to students that worked during daytime. New colleges preferred to offer vacancies in the humanities and social sciences, which did not need high capital investments in buildings, laboratories and equipment. Requirements to create new colleges were lowered by the government and often the newly established institutions did not meet minimum academic standards to offer an education of a satisfactory quality. Academic mediocrity tended to predominate, associated with commercial rather than educational concerns. About three years ago a survey conducted by the Council of Rectors of Brazilian Universities (CRUB) indicated that out of the 600 small private institutions that existed at the time approximately 200 offered classes only during the week-ends.

Graduate education followed a different path. The modernizing project carried out by the state promoted a vigourous expansion of graduate education, starting in the mid-seventies. With growing quality standards, it was geared to the development of science and technology in the country as well as to the training of new faculty, with a strong component of study abroad. Graduate programs in the country were developed mostly in public universities. More than 85% of the current enrollment in M.A. and doctoral programs are in public universities.

The modernizing project also include financial incentives to promote a gradual replacement of part-time faculty by full-time teaching staff. Its effects over time also produced substantial changes in the higher education scenario. In about fifteen years the share of full-time faculty in federal universities, for instance, jumped from 1/3 to the current 3/4. Private higher education changed very little in that regard; by the mid-eighties the corresponding share in the sector was a meagre 8%.

As a result of these processes the present scenario of higher education is extremely heterogeneous. The public sector, which is predominantly maintained by the federal government, enrolls 3/4 of its students in universities. In the private sector, only 1/3 of its students attend universities. In spite of the fast enrollment growth in the past, the total number of higher education students in the country still is small relative to the population. An enrollment of approximately 1.5 million corresponds to about 10% of the 20-24 age group, a proportion which is significantly lower than that observed in a number of other Latin American countries, like Argentina, Chile, Uruguai and Venezuela.

Heterogeneity also has to do with differentiated quality. There are universities - all but one in the public sector - whose research is comparable to good international standards. And there is a large number of small institutions, mostly in the private sector, whose teaching is certainly innaceptable by any academic standards.

Public universities dominate the scenario of good institutions of higher learning. One common indicator of academic performance is the proportion of faculty publications. If this proxy is used, one finds that more than 90% of what is published by the faculty of Brazilian graduate programs originate in public universities. But this proxy is subject to a number of serious inadequacies, as it will be discussed later. More reliable indicators of academic performance are the results of the evaluations of Brazilian graduate programs; these are routinely conducted every two years by the academic community and coordinated by an agency of the Ministry of Education. An useful indicator is the share of graduate programs, in each university, that revealed an excellent performance in the last evaluation conducted. Available data show that out of the 12 universities in which the upper third of their graduate programs were classified as excellent 11 belonged to the public sector.

The preceeding should have indicated the relevance of public universities - as compared to the private sector - for the advance of science and technology in the country as well as for the development of highly qualified human resources. Given this relevance, the following discussion on governance, autonomy and accountability of universities will address the institutions of the public sector.

Public universities and the state: governance and autonomy

Public policies for higher education along the last two decades or so have essentially followed, in regard to the autonomy and governance of public universities, the standards set by the university reform enacted during the authoritarian regime. The model of university defined by the reform was centered on concepts that are typical of private business rather than public university administration, like efficiency, effectiveness and productivity (Cunha, 1986). It was not concerned with the democratization of governance or with university autonomy. Rather, the reform was designed to reduce university autonomy, to increase its political dependency in regard to the state as well as to foster and to implement financing practices that should simultaneously diminish the allocation of public funds and require growing shares of private financing (Velloso, 1987).

a. Governance

Regarding governance, it is noticeable that the reform established a set of procedures that virtually guaranteed an alignment of the institution with government politics and policies. Before the reform, presidents and vice-presidents of public universities were chosen by the incumbent head of state* from a list containig names of three candidates. New rules established by the reform doubled the number of candidates as to facilitate the appointment of a name more in tune with the dominant political forces within the state. The list was to be - and currently is - prepared by upper-level academic councils in which deans or directors of schools and institutes participate, often with the majority of votes. Deans/associate deans or directors/vice-directors, in turn, were to be nominated by the head of state from lists in which the number of candidates also doubled from three to six and that were similarly prepared. The choice of heads and deputy heads of departments, to be appointed by the president of the institution, followed similar procedures.

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* Presidents and vice-presidents of federal universities were chosen and nominated by the President of the Republic; presidents and vice-presidents of state universities were chosen and appointed by the respective governor of state.

In the mid-seventies, when political repression began to decrease, previously timid and repressed civil movements for the defense of human rigths and democracy gradually started to emerge and grow. This was also a period in which new social movements began to flourish, encouraged by the results of the elections for the Congress in the late seventies, in which the government party was defeated by a large margin of votes. Soon these movements reached higher education. Several faculty associations were founded, followed by staff associations. The National Association of Higher Education Faculty (ANDES) initially performed a relevant role for the democratization of governance, within university walls, and also against authoritarian government policies, in society at large. In the eighties the association increasingly moved toward unionism and corporate demands, eventually changing its status into that of a faculty union.

Demands for an enlarged participation of faculty, staff and students in the governance of public universities, stemming from their respective associations, initially were welcomed by the university community and by society at large. By the mid-eighties, with the formal end of the military regime, their simbolic and actual contribution towars democracy dropped sharply. Along this process, those demands progressively lost their social character, becoming increasingly a response to narrow corporate interests, except in the case of the national student union, which tended to maintain its wider social and political concerns.

As a result of those demands, and of the strength of the pressures stemming from higher learning unions - particularly those of faculty and staff -, norms of governance of public universities have been de facto changed in a large number of institutions in the last few years. In these institutions, lists of candidates for the administrative positions of the university (from department heads to the president), instead of being independently made by the pertinent academic council, turned out to be the outcome of voting processes with the participation of student, staff and faculty. In this process, a so-called "parity rule" often applies. This artificial "parity" is reached by means of weights assigned to the votes so that each segment - students, staff and faculty - shares one third of the final counting of ballots. The lists are then submitted to the relevant academic councils formally in charge of preparing them. Very seldom an "elected" list is altered or rejected.

There are two other major thrusts of corporate demands regarding the governance of institutions of higher learning. One is to alter the rules for membership in the academic councils. The other has to do with the process of choice of administrators.

The former demand typically argues, in the name of democracy, that membership in all academic councils should follow the so-called artificial "parity rule", with representatives "elected" in equal proportions (1/3) by each of the segments -

students, staff and faculty. For most of the unions it seems that a democratic governance of the university is achieved when a a corporate state is built within its walls. This peculiar perception, of course, denies the specific aims of an university, research and teaching, which obviously cannot be manned by students or staff.

The latter demand argues, in the name of university autonomy, that the processes of choice of administrators should be restricted to election processes within the institution. Government interference in the processes would be limited to the appointment of the elected president. While there are no sound reasons to have deans or directors appointed by the incumbent head of state, except as an intent to violate university autonomy, elections of administrators by means of artificial "parity norms" represent another sort of violation, namely that of the concept of the university as a research and teaching institution. In addition, this demand apparently assumes that a public university is a microcosm of society, where autonomy is understood as sovereignity.

Those de facto changes in governance, implemented in a number of public universities, along with the prevaling climate in the election processes, in which unions have a strong say, have been apropriately termed as "university populism" (Cunha, 1988b; Gianotti, 1986). In such climate, potential candidates to administrative positions tend to yeld to union demands in exchange for votes; opposing candidates frequently stand for the same union demands. In the battle for votes, members of the faculty for whom these norms should prevail - the academic power as it is termed by Gianotti (cit.) - have been often defeated or coopted by the union power. Once an "elected" candidate is appointed, previous commitments to their client voters tend to prevail over the consuetudinary norms that should rule the academy.

All these processes have been producing negative effects on the pace of the advance of research and teaching standards in a number of Brazilian universities. They also tends to submit the governance of these institutions to the corporatism of its three segments - faculty, staff and students. Both trends reduce the credibility of public universities before society at large and seriously affect the autonomy society may wish to grant to the institution.

Unionism in higher education seems to be a rather widely diffused phenomenon in a number of countries, particularly in Latin America. Venezuela perhaps is an example where it has reached considerable development at the expense of rendering public institutions accountable to society (Albornoz, 1988). In Brazil, only in the last few years the issue of the accountability of public universities has emerged. This is commonly viewed as having to do with the academic performance of the institution. But as I have suggested elsewhere (Velloso, 1986), the relationships that public universities should keep

with society, in order to able to claim the required resources for their maintenance and development, are supposed to encompass its governance as well, among other variables. Thus, an adequate and enlarged concept of accountability should has to do with the full network of the relationships that the institution maintains with society, which includes the roles society plays and should play - directly or mediated by elected representatives - in the governance of public universities (Velloso, 1986).

Brazil's new Constitution, in force since October, 1988, brought some significant advances for the governance and management of the educational sector. One of such avances is the norm stating that the governance of public educational institutions, at all levels of schooling, should follow democratic principles. This norm, in order to be implemented, should await the enactment of a complementary law in which the Constitutional rule will be operationally defined. Corporate perspectives have a good chance of being defeated in this future law.

Whatever are the new operational definitions to be established, however, the issue of accountability of the public university remains to be faced by the institution, involving both its academic performance and its governance - which are, in fact, two sides of the same coin. One of the relevant challenges that public universities face in the years to come is conquer their autonomy and simultaneously be accountable to the society that maintains them. A couple of issues related to this will be taken up in the final section, with an emphasis on academic performance.

b. Autonomy

The issue of the autonomy of public universities is closely connected with that of governance. It envolves, for instance, the debate on the processes of choice of university administrators vis à vis the state. But there other facets of autonomy which are equally relevant.

University autonomy, as defined by the higher education reform of the authoritarian regime, is very limited in its academic, administrative and financial management dimensions. Actually the concept, as defined, intended to allow the state to exercise a rather strict control over public universities. Ensuing policies were essentially based on this restrictive concept of autonomy. A few examples will illustrate the substance of the limitations imposed on the autonomy of public universities.

Regarding academic autonomy, for instance, they are allowed to offer courses for additional careers without previous authorization by the state. But existing and new courses of study have to follow minimum curricula defined elsewhere, at the Ministry of Education. Such requirement limits innovation and

denies the academic competence of the faculty members involved. Arguments in favor of such requirement often assert that it is a guarantee against poor teaching standards, although experience has shown that it was not able to prevent the drop in the quality of teaching that has been observed in a number of undergraduate programs in the recent past.

From an administrative standpoint, public universities - especially those maintained by the federal government - are subjected to virtually all rules and norms that apply to civil service. This represents a severe limitation to their efficiency and effectiveness. Faculty hiring, for instance, should depend upon the specific needs of each institution and on available resources in the university budget. But it depends, first and foremost, on the existence of vacancies in plans that are approved by the state and that specify the quantities and kinds of faculty and staff according to inflexible rules which are not germane to the changing needs of the institution.

Faculty salaries follow one single schedule for all federal universities, in spite of substantial variations in the cost of living among cities and regions and despite the differences in the characteristics of the various institutions. In the early eighties two different salary schedules applied to the two kinds of organization of federal universities (foundations and autarquias). Faculty unions pressed - with success - for the unification of the salary schedules based on equity considerations; for that purpose they counted upon a vast support on the part of professors that were underpaid relative to their other colleagues.

Equity considerations certainly recommend one single salary schedule when two schedules apply to similar tasks performed. But the issue is not if one single or two salary schedules should apply to all. The real issue is what are the adequate salaries for faculty and staff, performing diverse tasks, in different institutions under different working conditions and in different cities and regions of the country. Salary schedules are expected to foster competitiveness in the career, thus contributing to a continuous raise of academic standards. University autonomy, therefore, should imply that the institution is free to determine, within the limitations of its budget, its own salary schedule as well as the quantities and kinds of faculty and staff required to meet its specific needs at a given moment in time and over time.

Autonomy does not mean sovereignity and thus public authorities should exercise some control over public universities. But current controls are formal and bureaucratic, exercised over means for achieving aims and not over performance. Evaluation of performance certainly would be a more effective sort of control. In addition, results of performance evaluation have the advantage of rendering the institution accountable to society, who maintains it. But there are further reasons to recommend periodic evaluations of public universities.

Universities, society and accountability: a few challenges

The new Brazilian Constitution brought an innovation of utmost importance for public universities in the country, establishing their autonomy from the academic, administrative and financial management standpoints. This new norm, to be effective, will have to wait a complementary law for education to define its operational meaning, as it occurs with the Constitutional rule regarding the governance of public educational institutions. But actual autonomy will have to be conquered, both in its operational definition in the new law and in the day-by-day concrete relations that the university maintains with society. A promising path to obtain the autonomy that public universities need in order to adequately perform their tasks is to make them accountable to society.

a. University status and accoutability

During the past few decades establishing a university in Brazil has been typically a gradual process, in which a previously existing set of colleges apply for the status of a university. The status is to be granted only if satisfactory performance has been observed and adequate academic standards are met.

It should be pointed out, however, that it appears that a number of colleges - especially but no only private colleges - that did not meet those academic standards (Cunha, 1988c) have been granted the a university status during the past ten years or so. This is not directly relevant for the argument that follows but it will be taken up later.

Granting the university status to a higher learning institution implies autonomy. Autonomy, in its turn, implies a large margin of independence in the pursuit of the aims of the institution. Autonomy is granted because, among other reasons, this independence will presumably enhance rather than limit the pursuit of the institution's aims, which involve the search for excellency in all domains of its academic activities. As far as public universities are concerned, the counterpart of autonomy is a continuous response to society's demands, within the prerrogatives inherent to autonomy.*

University status and the autonomy that it implies are granted for good. It happens, however, that adequate performance and satisfaction of academic standards observed at the time the

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* This is meant to say that society's demands upon the institution are mediated by the university's expertise and academic standards before they eventually become an academic activity.

institution obtained its university status may or may not have been maintained over time. If adequate performance, which involves the search for excellency, has not been maintained for some period of time, the institution has actually ceased to be an university in the strict sense of the concept. Then the autonomy implied by the university status should be no longer valid. That institution, in order to adequately fullfill its aims, requires close supervision and advice instead of the independence commanded by autonomy.

If the preceeding is true, it follows that the decision to grant the university status - and the autonomy that goes with it - should not have permanent effects. Rather, it should depend on periodic evaluations of the institution's performance.

This approach to the the university status of a higher learning institution has some chances of becoming one of the salient features of the future new law for education in the country. Arguments in favor of this approach (e.g. Durham, 1989) are being extensively discussed in the eve of the debate in the National Congress that will preceed the approval of the law. This approach, to be effective, need to be incorporated in the educational law that will operationally define the Constitutional rules for the sector. If it becomes effective it will represent a significant contribution to the advance of public universities in the country.

b. Autonomy and accountability

The future new law for education will also operationally define, as mentioned, the substantive contents of the Constitutional rule on university autonomy. These substantive contents depend on the answers to a wide variety of very specific questions. Which are the norms of public service that will apply to public universities? Are these institutions going to be able to define their own curricula? Will they be permitted to to hire faculty according to their specific needs and budget limitations? What sort of diversity will be allowed in salary schedules for faculty and staff? Answers to these questions and to many others are the elements of a substantive and operational definition of university autonomy. Every answer entails a certain distance from sovereignity as well as certain duties to be fullfilled.

The substantive contents of autonomy depends, among other variables, on how far goes the relative independence that society wishes to grant to public universities. This depends, in turn, on whether autonomy will enhance or hinder the performance of the institution and on how far is the institution accountable to society.

This is why the approach to university status as discussed above contributes to a substantive definition of autonomy that will help public universities to attain its aims. The approach requires periodic evaluations of performance, enhancing the

institution's accountability. Moreover, it is likely that society wishes to go farther in the relative independence that is granted to public universities if it can be assured that autonomy, implied by the university status, will remain in force only as long as it helps the institution to attain its aims, rather than serving other purposes. Periodic evaluations of performance that may eventually revoke the university status granted in the past is one of the paths to this assurance.

These evaluations are likely to lead to a change in the status of a few existing universities. This applies to some of those that were established during the last ten years or so, since at the time they obtained their university status the required academic standards were not actually met. If the above mentioned aproach to the university status is included in the new education law, the expectations regarding those changes are likely to contribute to society's assurance that autonomy will be in force only for those institutions who are able to properly benefit from it.

The approach under discussion may also bring a positive contribution to university governance. Once adopted, it will probably refrain the impetus of corporate demands that imply rules and processes of governance that are detrimental to the improvement of academic standards and to the search of excellency. Since decreasing academic standards may be conducive to the loss of the university status, chances are that unions take this into due account when their demands are formulated.

While this approach presents a number of advantages it also poses quite a few challenges. Custom, as well as vested interests in the maintenance of privileges, present some serious obstacles to its inclusion in the future education law. Here a relevant role may be played by the professional competence of educators in discussing the issues involved with society, particularly with congressman, as well as by their ability to countervail the political pressures stemming from those vested interests.

c. A performance indicator: problems and prospects

A number of other challenges are entailed by the implementation of the approach. Evaluating the performance of universities is a task plagued with all sort of difficulties. Experience in third world countries is rather small and recent in this area and so is the literature coverage of the issues involved. One of the various challenges that will arise with the implementation of this approach is related to the development of adequated indicators to evaluate performance.*

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* At least two pilot experiences in the area of university evaluation are being or have been undertaken in Brazil. Both deal or have dealt with the development of some performance

Some of the indicators commonly used to evaluate research development, and thus academic performance, both in scientifically hegemonic nations and in scientifically peripheral countries, are the citation indexes. These attempt to measure the relevance and impact of publications. Relevance and impact are measured by indexes that essentially take into account how often a publication is cited in other publications, such as scientific journals that are relevant to and have wide circulation in the pertinent field. Citation indexes presumably would be useful to appraise the relative performance of different academic institutions within one country as well as between countries.

Scientific indicators, as these indexes are also called, are widely used but have been receiving various criticisms in the hegemonic nations where they have been developed. As Velho (1990) puts, it, current indicators (like the Science Citation Index - SCI) typically do not account for the substantial heterogeneity that exists in the organization of science or in the academic communication networks in different countries. In addition, they do not take in due consideration the behavior pattern of scientists belonging to different branches of knowledge nor the diverse nature of basic and applied research. In short, in the current state of the art they are of litttle help in decision-making in science and technology and, for that matter, to reveal reliable differences in the performance of our universities and to map out problem areas in academic development.

The current state of the art thus suggest an acute need of further further studies on the nature and organization of our academic communication networks in peripheral countries.

This task, however, as the author sugggests, is not an endeavour to be carried out by experts alone. It has both scientific and socio-political dimensions that require the cooperation of other actors as well. To be carried out effectively, it should initially involve faculties and departments of universities and, in a following stage, scientific associations as well as government agencies and representatives of society at large. The academic and social legitimacy that scientific indicators should enjoy is relevant in itself, but it particularly so when the performance evaluations in which they are going to be used will help to define whether the university status (and its respective autonomy) will or not be granted to a higher learning institution.

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*(continued from previous page)
indicators. The University of Brasília, for instance, presently is carrying out a pilot evaluation study of its performance under the coordination of Prof. I. Belloni. The University of Sáo Paulo started a pilot evaluation project about a couple of years ago, under the coordination of Prof. L. Velho (see Velho, 1990); she no longer manages the project, which seems to have been interrupted.

Research and development on scientific indicators, in peripheral countries, is an area in which further work is badly need provided that due consideration is given to the academic and socio-political context of each nation, among other relevant varibles. This is also an area in which international cooperation has its limitations, given the scarcity of studies on the use of scientific indicators in peripheral countries. But at the same time the cooperation may be especially valuable, since available expertise in the design and use of these indicators is extremely concentrated in hegemonic nations. The challenge here, as it often happens in the field of international cooperation, is to view and conduct it as a process in which expertise will not simply be brought ready-made from abroad, but one in which some knowledge basis developed elsewhere is to be built anew in another country.

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